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CHAPTER III CENSUSES OF MODERN TIMES

SECTION I. GREAT BRITAIN AND IRELAND

1. England and Wales.

Prior to the commencement of the nineteenth century, no direct method had been adopted to enumerate the population of England. Various estimates of the population had, however, been formed at previous periods, based upon the Domesday Book, Subsidy Rolls, and payments of Hearth and Poll taxes, but they involved of necessity so large an intermixture of guesswork as to greatly diminish the value of their results.

(i.) *First Proposal for Systematic Enumeration, 1753.* No proposal to ascertain the population of England and Wales by systematic enumeration appears to have been made until the middle of the 18th century. On the 30th March, 1753, Mr. Thomas Potter, M.P., introduced a Bill "for taking and registering an annual account of the total number of the people, and of the total number of marriages, births, and deaths; and also of the total number of the poor receiving alms. . . ." This measure met with violent opposition in certain quarters and called forth denunciations and prophecies of an extraordinary and virulent nature, and although successful in passing through all its stages in the House of Commons, was eventually thrown out in the House of Lords.

(ii.) *First Census, 1801.* Nearly half a century elapsed before the proposal was renewed. In 1800 a Census Act (41 Geo. III., 31st Dec., 1800) was passed through all its stages without opposition, this change in public opinion being probably attributable to some extent to the fear that the people were increasing so rapidly as to outstrip the means of subsistence. This alarm was accentuated by the great dearth which prevailed in the country at the time when the Bill was brought forward, and also by the attention excited by the publication of Malthus' essay "On Population," which first appeared anonymously in 1798. The census provided for by the Act of 1800 was taken on the 10th March, 1801, when England and Wales were found to contain 8,892,536 and Scotland 1,608,420 inhabitants. The census of 1801 did not extend to Ireland.

(iii.) *Censuses, 1801 to 1831:* The census of 1801 has been followed by enumerations made decennially in the first year of each decade. The important work of census-taking has, strange to say, not yet been recognised by the British Legislature as being of a permanent character, and consequently, a special authorising Act has to be passed for each census.

The first four censuses of England and Wales were taken by the agency of the overseers of the poor, or of substantial householders in each parish or place, and the results were abstracted under the superintendence of Mr. Rickman, Assistant Clerk to the House of Commons. These censuses differed but little from each other as regards both the scope and machinery of the inquiry.

(a) *Method of Collection.* The overseers collected information concerning the inhabitants of their respective parishes by personal inquiry, and, on the basis of the information thus collected, framed answers to printed questions addressed to them concerning the numbers and occupations of the persons living in their parishes.

(b) *Scope of Inquiry.* The principal population inquiries were those relating to (1) Families; (2) Sexes; and (3) Occupations.

A list of questions was transmitted to the overseers of the poor or a substantial householder in "every Parish, Township, and Place," and such overseers and householders were required to take the necessary steps for obtaining answers thereto. In 1801 each overseer was required to furnish for his district the number of families, the number of persons of each sex, exclusive of soldiers and seamen, the number of houses inhabited and uninhabited, and the number of persons employed in (a) Agriculture, (b) Trades, Manufactures, or Handicraft, or (c) neither of the foregoing. In 1811 the Occupation inquiry was amended and was made to relate to families instead of persons, while the number of houses being built was also included. At the census of 1821 provision was for the first time made for a record of ages in groups. It was, however, optional for the overseer to make the inquiry, and it was also optional for the person enumerated to furnish a reply. At the census of 1831 the number of questions addressed to the overseers was increased from seven to sixteen; the Occupation inquiry was considerably extended, but the detailed enumeration of ages was dropped, the only age particulars ascertained being the number of males aged upwards of 20 years engaged in each of the seven groups of occupations specified. The areas of the parishes were given for the first time at the census of 1831.

(iv.) *Present System Introduced, 1841.* In the year 1840 a lengthy report was issued by a Committee of the Statistical Society of London (now the Royal Statistical Society), appointed for the purpose of considering the best mode of taking the census of the United Kingdom in 1841. This Committee, after reviewing the census methods adopted by the leading European countries, and in the United States, recommended that the statutory co-operation of the Poor Law Commissioners and of the Registrar-General appeared to be essential to the proper conduct of the census of 1841. The Committee also recommended that the system of enumeration by names, as pursued at the Irish Censuses of 1821 and 1831, and not by mere marks, was of great importance in order to obtain "security against fallacious returns". The subjects of inquiry suggested by the Committee were as follows: (a) age, (b) sex, (c) unmarried, married, or widowed, (d) occupations, (e) place of birth, (f) religious persuasion, and (g) healthy, sick, or permanently infirm. The Committee also recommended that the work of actual enumeration should be carried out in rural districts by the entry in books at each house of the particulars concerning its inmates, but that in the towns, the method then pursued in Belgium of circulating householder's schedules in the form of queries to the master of each house should be adopted. Seven queries were suggested, each relating to one of the suggested subjects of inquiry. The recommendations of this Committee were to a large extent adopted at the census of 1841, and in many respects they now form the basis of census methods both in the United Kingdom and Australia, as well as many other parts of the British Empire.

The Registration (Births, Deaths, and Marriages) Act had come into force in 1837; and for the purposes of this Act, the whole country had been mapped out into a number of districts, each with a superintendent registrar, and these districts again subdivided into sub-districts, each with a resident registrar, whose duty it was to keep account of the births and deaths in his sub-district; while, presiding over the whole system, was the Registrar-General with a staff of assistants in London. It was obvious that such an organisation as this was well adapted to furnish the framework of the machinery for the work of enumeration, and the business was therefore taken out of the hands of the parochial overseers and entrusted to the new body of local registrars.

(a) *The Occupiers' Schedules.* Other important alterations were also introduced at the census of 1841. The age inquiry was reintroduced, the birthplaces were recorded, and the occupations were all arranged, according to the householder's statement, alphabetically. A very important change was also made in the method of enumeration, the submission of a list of questions to overseers, etc., being discarded in favour of *Occupiers' Schedules*, in which the desired particulars were entered by the occupier himself with regard to all persons present in his house on a certain fixed night. Each person was specified by name, so that this was the first "nominal " census taken in England.

(b) *Collection and Compilation.* The schedules were distributed and collected by special enumerators, each registrar's sub-district being parcelled out by him for that purpose. At the first four censuses each overseer was required to classify and summarise the information collected by him, returning in his report simply the numerical results for his district. At the 1841 and subsequent censuses, however, all compilation and tabulation was carried out at the Head Office, thereby securing greater uniformity than had been hitherto obtainable.

(v.) **The Census of 1851.** The method of enumeration introduced at the census of 1841 was found to answer so well that it has been continued on each subsequent occasion without material alteration. A report, issued by the Census (1851) Committee of the Statistical Society in 1850, approved generally of the adoption, at the census of 1851, of the methods used in 1841. The system has, however, been amplified and amended in certain minor respects. The census of 1851 exhibited statistics not only of parishes and parliamentary and municipal boroughs, but also of all important large towns and ecclesiastical districts and parishes. In addition to the subjects of inquiry previously included in the schedule of 1841, it was determined to ascertain various relationships (such as husband, wife, son, daughter), the conjugal condition (as married, unmarried, widow, etc.), and the number of persons blind, deaf, or dumb. Two collateral branches of inquiry were prosecuted in 1851 by means of the census machinery, but not under the compulsory powers of the statute; these related to (a) the provision existing for religious worship, (b) the means existing for education, and the attendance at churches and schools.

In 1851, Dr. Farr introduced a classification in which the occupations were divided into six classes, containing eighteen orders. This principle has, with some modifications and extensions, been since maintained, and in the classification used at the present Commonwealth Census there are now eight classes, and twenty-seven orders.

(vi.) **The Census of 1861.** In 1861 the census of Scotland, which had always previously been provided for in the same Act as that of England and Wales, was arranged for in a separate Act. This practice was continued until 1901, when the original method of legislating for the whole of Great Britain in the same Act was reverted to. The census of 1861 distinguished sex, age, conjugal condition, relation to head of family, profession, and birthplace. The collateral inquiries as to religion and education were dropped. The census of Ireland has always been the subject of separate legislation.

(vii.) **The Census of 1871.** The census taken on the 3rd April, 1871, marked an important extension of the system, since on that occasion, for the first time, an attempt was made to enumerate the population of the whole of the British Possessions. It should be noted, however, that this census was by no means synchronous throughout the Empire; in Western Australia and Tasmania the census was taken in 1870, while the enumeration was not synchronous either for the whole of the Indian Empire or for the Dominion of Canada. The Census (1871) Committee of the Statistical Society reported in 1870 that it was not desirable to depart from the arrangements made at previous censuses, but recommended that the inquiries made at the census of 1851 into (a) the provision existing for religious worship and the attendance thereon, and (b) the means

existing for education and the attendance at schools and places of instruction, should be reintroduced. Those recommendations, however, were not adopted.

The total number of persons in the British Empire enumerated in 1871 was 234,802,593, of which number 31,484,661 were in the United Kingdom, and 191,307,070 in British India. The number of registration districts in England and Wales for the census of 1871 was 626. The important development of the census of 1871 opened the way for fresh ranges of inquiry, by which questions of great importance could be approached. Materials were furnished for ascertaining the relative growth of different colonies --- their progress by immigration or natural increase --- and rates of mortality in different parts of the Empire could be compared.

(viii.) **Later Censuses.** Since the year 1871, simultaneous censuses of the various portions of the British Empire have been taken in 1881, 1891, 1901, and 1911, and in England and Wales the system in force at the census of 1871 has not since been materially departed from. The total population of the British Empire recorded at the Census of 1901 was 398,401,704, while that enumerated at the census of 1911 exceeded 420,000,000.

Particulars have already been given in tabular form as to the progressive development of the English schedule.

(ix.) **Reports on Censuses by Committees of Royal Statistical Society.** In 1879 a committee was appointed by the Council of the Statistical Society of London for the purpose of considering whether advantageous suggestions as regards improvements in the inquiries or machinery connected with the census of 1881 could be made. The more important recommendations of this Committee were as follow :-

- (a) That the same form of schedule should be adopted in all parts of the United Kingdom.
- (b) That additional subjects of inquiry should include "religious profession" and "number of rooms in each dwelling house," and
- (c) That the classification of houses and the inquiry as to birthplaces be extended.

The Committee also expressed an opinion that it was desirable, for a variety of purposes, that the census should be taken quinquennially. The only one of these recommendations adopted was that dealing with the inquiry as to "birthplaces."

In 1888 another Committee appointed by the Council of the Royal Statistical Society with reference to the census of 1891, submitted a report recommending that a permanent Act should be passed for a quinquennial census, and that a separate and permanent Census Office should be created. At the 1891 census of England and Wales particulars were included as to whether employer, employee, or neither, and as to the number of rooms occupied if less than five. Otherwise the schedule was identical with that used at the previous census. The taking of a census in the United Kingdom limited to number, age, and sex, midway between the decennial periods, and the establishment of a permanent census staff were further urged in a memorial and by a deputation from the Royal Statistical Society to the President of the Local Government Board in 1894.

A further Committee of the Royal Statistical Society reported in 1897 with reference to the proposed universal census of 1900 that the following five facts were all that should be insisted on for uniform treatment :- (a) Number of *de facto* population. (b) Sex. (c) Age - the first 5 years separately, the rest in quinquennial periods, distinguishing the sexes. (d) Conjugal condition - as single, married, widowed, combined with sex and age. (e) Birthplace. A second report was

furnished by this Committee in 1899, making several recommendations as to alterations in the schedules and especially with a view to attaining uniformity of the schedules throughout the United Kingdom. The majority of these recommendations were adopted by Parliament and incorporated in the Census Act, 1900. An unsuccessful attempt was made in 1900 to obtain the insertion in the Census Act of that year of a clause providing for an interim census in 1906, and again, in 1904, a deputation (representing the Royal Statistical Society, the Institute of Actuaries, the Society of Medical Officers of Health, and the British Medical Association) to the President of the Local Government Board unsuccessfully urged the establishment of a quinquennial census of a limited character, viz., dealing with numbers, sex, and age only.

In September, 1908, the first report of the Census (1911) Committee of the Royal Statistical Society was issued. This report dealt with questions which were considered urgent in connection with the preparatory work. The second report, adopted in April, 1909, contained recommendations as to the form in which the final results of the census should be exhibited, together with proposals regarding an organised enumeration of the Empire. The first part of the final report was divided into three sections dealing respectively with (i.) Schedule, etc., (ii.) Tabulation, and (iii.) A permanent Census Office. The second part of the report dealt with the question of an Imperial Census.

I. (i.) *Schedule, etc.* The Committee recommended (a) that an Act should be passed providing for a general census to be taken every ten years, and for an enumeration by sex and age every intervening fifth year; (b) that the schedule should be uniform throughout the United Kingdom as to the main subjects of inquiry; (c) that in the inquiry as to Conjugal Condition, the condition of "divorced" should be recognised; (d) that an optional inquiry as to religion should be instituted; (e) that the inquiries as to occupation and birthplace be extended; and (f) that the inquiry as to infirmities should be amended. A draft of the schedule headings and instructions, in which the above recommendations were embodied was appended to the report.

(ii.) *Tabulation.* The recommendations of the Committee as to the form in which the results of the census should be finally exhibited comprise the additions consequent upon the suggestions regarding the schedule, together with such modifications of the tables of the last census as were held to be statistically desirable. With regard to the classification of occupations the Committee suggested, with a view to an Imperial compilation, that the returns should be adapted so as to permit of a scheme of tabulation such as is found amongst the Australian returns of 1901.

(iii.) *A Permanent Census Office.* The advantages of a permanent establishment to deal with work connected with the census were again referred to, and the establishment of a Census Commission was recommended.

II. *Imperial Census.* The Committee held that uniformity in the schedule or scope of the inquiry throughout the Empire is no more attainable or necessary than in the actual date of the enumeration. It was pointed out, however, that it is desirable that the States of South Africa should bring their operations into line with those of other parts of the Empire, and also that the census should not be again allowed to lapse in those West Indian Colonies where none was taken in 1901. The Committee were of opinion that the subjects to which Imperial comparison can be most usefully directed are ; (a) Sex; (b) Age; (c) Conjugal Condition; (d) Birthplace; and (e) Occupation.

2. Scotland.

The earliest census in Scotland was taken in 1801 in conjunction with the first census of England and Wales. The actual work of collection was, however, and has subsequently been, quite

distinct from that of England and Wales, and has been controlled by specially appointed census authorities in Edinburgh. In Scotland the method was adopted of employing the parish schoolmasters to perform the local duty of enumerating the population in the country districts. As previously pointed out, provisions for the Census of Scotland were, from 1801 to 1851 inclusive, contained in the same Act as those for the census of England and Wales, while from 1861 to 1891 inclusive, separate legislation was passed for the two divisions. In 1901 the original method of including all the provisions for the census of Great Britain in one Act was reverted to.

(i.) *Census of 1861.* In Scotland there having been no such organisation of registrar's districts as had been effected in England in 1837, the important administrative changes in the 1841 census of England could not be adopted at the 1841 census of Scotland. The Registration Act for Scotland came into force, however, on the 1st January, 1855, and the census of 1861 was made under the superintendence of the Registrar-General for Scotland through the agency of 1001 local registrars, and 8075 enumerators. At this census the population of Scotland was 3,062,294. The forms and instructions issued were all based on, and in most cases virtually the same as, those used in England in the census of 1851. Other features of the census of Scotland of 1861 were the tabulation of particulars relative to the number of families in every parish and county, to the number of dwellings having windows, and to the number of children between the ages 5 and 13 in attendance at school.

(ii.) *Census of 1871.* The returns of this census for Scotland contained some new features, such as the ecclesiastical subdivision of civil counties, grouping the population into three great divisions according as they inhabited towns, villages, or rural parts, and returns as to houses, families, and population in parliamentary constituencies.

(iii.) *Later Censuses.* The census of 1891 introduced additional inquiries as to the number of (1) Employers, (2) Employed, (3) Workers on their own account, and (4) others of whom no statement is made. The schedules used in recent censuses have been substantially the same as those used in England and Wales.

3. Ireland.

Prior to the inauguration of periodical census-taking in Ireland, several population estimates had been made at various times, the earliest on record being that of Sir William Petty in 1672. Another estimate, concerning which brief particulars appear in the transactions of the Royal Society of London, was made in 1695 by Captain South. Again, during the eighteenth century, numerous estimates of a more or less trustworthy nature were made on the basis of the number of houses returned by the Hearth-money Collectors, while in 1731 an inquiry was instituted by order of the House of Lords of Ireland for ascertaining the population through the medium of the Magistracy and the Established Clergy. In 1805 Major Newenham published an estimate of the population in the preparation of which he had endeavoured to correct the inaccuracies of the Hearth-money returns.

(i.) **Early Censuses:** The first attempt at a general census was made in 1811, but it was decidedly unsuccessful. It was repeated in 1821, but went no further than a bare enumeration. The census of 1821 was taken under the Population Act, 1815 by which the duty of superintending the general management of the proceedings throughout the counties was transferred from the grand juries to the bench of magistrates assembled at sessions. The census taken in 1831 was subjected to correction in 1834, to make it the basis of a new system of national education.

(ii.) **Later Censuses:** In 1841 it was resolved to obtain statistics of agricultural production in Ireland. The attempt was found so successful that it was renewed in greater detail at the census of 1851. The enumeration of the people of Ireland in 1861 was effected for the first time throughout the country (excepting the metropolis) by the officers and men of the Royal Irish

Constabulary. In 1871 the enumeration of Ireland was undertaken by the Registrar-General of Ireland. Later censuses have been taken decennially, and are provided for on each occasion by special legislation, as in England, Wales, and Scotland.

- 01 See Census Report, England and Wales, 1881; also" Some Account of the Census from 1801 to 1881" by A. F. BurrIDGE, F.1..A. Journal of the Institute of Actuaries, Vol. XXV., p. 83 <back>
- 02 See Census of Great Britain, 1851, Vol. 1., Population Tables, pp. ix. and x. <back>
- 03 The whole of the country had not been placed under the Poor Law Acts. <back>
- 04 01 See Journal of the Statistical Society of London, Vol. III., pp. 72 to 102. <back>
- 05 See General Report, Census 1881, Vol. IV. <back>
- 06 See Journal of the Statistical Society, Vol. XIII, pp. 268-70 <back>
- 07 See Report of Commissioners of Census of United Kingdom, 1851 <back>
- 08 See Journal of the Statistical Society, Vol. XXXIII., p. 113 <back>
- 09 See p.14, Statistician's Report, 1911 <back>
- 10 See Ibid, Vol. XLIII., p. 134 <back>
- 11 See Ibid., Vol. LI., p. 816 <back>
- 12 See Ibid, Vol. LVII., pp. 379-83 <back>
- 13 See Ibid., Vol. LX., p. 162. 22 Census of the Commonwealth of Australia, 1911 <back>
- 14 See Journal of the Royal Statistical Society, Vol. LXII., pp. 679-81 <back>
- 15 See Ibid, Vol. LXVII., pp, 272-81 <back>
- 16 See Ibid, Vol., LXXI., pp. 496-8 <back>
- 17 See Ibid, Vol. LXXII., pp. 574-593 <back>
- 18 See Ibid, Vol. III., p.96 <back>
- 19 See Journal of the Statistical Society of London, Vol. III., p. 91 <back>
- 20 The Registration Act for Ireland Came into force on the 1st January, 1864 <back>

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